



Landline Phone Service Trouble



OUCS Consumer Fact Sheet

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Quick Facts:

- ◆ Loss of phone service, static and other trouble with your landline telephone service may be caused by any of several problems.
- ◆ Testing your Network Interface Device (NID) is simple and will usually determine whether fixing the problem is your responsibility or the phone company's.
- ◆ You are responsible for repairs to the telephone wiring or equipment in your home or business (unless you are renting the property, in which case the landlord may be responsible).

Picking up your telephone and hearing static on the line can be very annoying, while picking up the phone and hearing no dial tone or any other sound can either be frustrating or can have more serious consequences. Landline telephone problems can happen for a variety of reasons. Static or the absence of a dial tone could indicate a problem with the phone company's lines outside your building or bad wiring or faulty equipment inside your building.

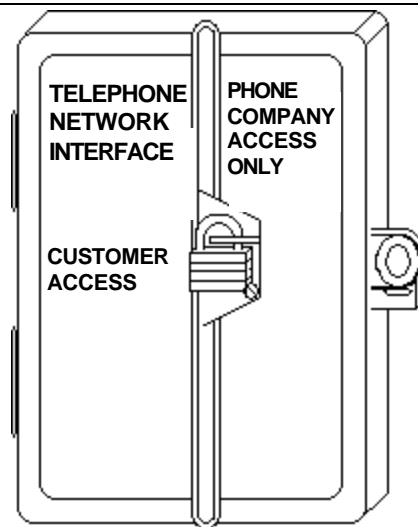
No Dial Tone or Static on the Line: What to Do

When you experience problems with your landline phone service, check the **Network Interface Device (NID)**, a small gray box usually located on the outside of your home or business, to determine whether the cause is your responsibility or the phone company's to fix. As outlined below, checking the NID is simple and only takes a few minutes.

If a problem is caused by wiring or equipment in your home or business, you will be responsible for making the repair. This may be as simple as purchasing a new phone or installing a new phone jack. You may repair the problem yourself or hire someone else to do so. You are not required to hire the phone company to fix a problem with your internal wiring or equipment. See the IWMS section below for more information.

If you have lost landline phone service or are experiencing poor quality after severe weather, check with neighboring homes or businesses to see if they are having the same problem. A fallen tree limb or excess water could be causing trouble on the phone company's system.

After checking the NID and, if appropriate, checking with neighbors, report the problem to the phone company. The company will advise you of the information it has, if any, about the problem and its planned response. A brief summary of Indiana telephone Service Quality Rules is on the reverse side of this fact sheet.



About the NID (Little Gray Box)

The NID is a small gray box where the phone lines enter your home or business. It is usually located on the outside of the building, often near your electric meter. The purpose of the NID is to allow consumers with phone problems to determine if the responsibility for fixing the problem is the consumer's or the phone company's.

The NID is the "dividing point." The telephone company is responsible for maintaining and repairing lines located on the network side of the NID, while any wiring and equipment on the customer's side of the NID (inside) at your home or business is your responsibility.

NIDs are installed on most buildings that were constructed after 1986. If you live or work in an older building and either do not have or cannot locate your NID, contact your phone company. Under state regulations, you can have a NID installed without charge on any residential line or any business account with up to three lines.

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The Indiana Office of Utility Consumer Counselor (OUCS) is the state agency that represents the interests of all utility consumers and the general public in matters related to the provision of utility services. The agency is active in proceedings before regulatory and legal bodies, and committed to giving consumers a voice in the creation of utility service policy.

Testing the NID

Contact your phone utility for detailed instructions on using your NID. Generally, each NID has two compartments: one for customer access and another for telephone company access only. Before testing the NID, unplug all telephones in your house and carefully read the following instructions and the disclaimer below.

- Open the “customer access” compartment.
 - For your safety, do not stand in a puddle or any other standing water when doing a NID test. Also, testing the NID when it is raining is not advisable.
- Plug a working telephone into the appropriate test jack, wait for a dial tone and make a local call.
 - **Important:** Confirm that the “test” phone is working properly. For example, use the phone to make a call at a neighboring home or business to confirm that the phone itself is not experiencing or causing the problem.
- If the problem you are investigating (such as static or absence of a dial tone) occurs on the test call, the problem is most likely in the outside line, which is the phone company’s responsibility.
- If the problem you are investigating does **not** occur on the test call, the problem is likely with the wiring or equipment inside your home or business.

Inside Wire Maintenance Service (IWMS) Plans

Some telephone companies may offer inside wire maintenance service (IWMS) plans, which essentially function as “insurance policies” on telephone wiring inside the home or business. The customer pays a monthly fee for the plan and receives free or reduced cost repairs from the telephone company if and when his or her inside wiring develops problems. (Some IWMS plans cover materials and labor costs. Others include material costs only.)

Whether the cost of an IWMS plan is worth the relatively small risk of an inside wire failure or other problem is a decision that each consumer must make for himself or herself. Consumers should carefully read the IWMS agreement, clearly understand what the program does and does not cover and be aware of applicable labor rates, deductibles and maximum coverage.

Consumers who live or work in rented space may never need to purchase IWMS plans if their landlords have retained responsibility for telephone wiring on their rental properties. Consumers who live on rental property should consult their lease agreements, landlords and/or local laws before signing up for IWMS plans.

Service Quality Rules

Indiana consumers have specific rights regarding telecommunications service quality, under rules that took effect in February 2003. The new rules include the following standards for connection of new service, as well as repair of service to existing telephone lines:

- Local telephone service providers must complete 92 percent of requests for new service within five business days.
- 92 percent of all reported local phone service outages must be corrected within 24 hours of the customer’s report.
 - A customer is to receive a bill credit equal to 33 percent of the recurring monthly service charge if service is not restored within 24 hours.
 - An additional 33 percent credit is required for each additional 24 hour period without service.
- Local phone service utilities must provide a customer with a four-hour appointment window for any repairs that require the customer to be present.
 - If the company cannot keep the appointment, it must notify the customer by 6:00 p.m. the day before.
 - If the company fails to keep the appointment and does not provide the required notification, the company must give the customer a \$50 bill credit.
- Local telephone service providers are required to keep accurate records of trouble reports.
 - If a company’s monthly average number of customer trouble reports for one exchange area exceeds 5 per 100 access lines, the company must file a written report with the IURC within 30 days.
- State rules set timeframes for local telephone service providers to answer consumer calls during normal business hours. On a monthly basis:
 - Answering speed for calls to a provider’s repair center or business offices must average 60 seconds or less.
 - Answering speed for calls to directory assistance or local service operators must average 20 seconds or less.
 - Fewer than 10 percent of calls to the above services, on average, should get a busy signal or be disconnected.

The new service quality rules are detailed in the Indiana Administrative Code (170 IAC 7-1.2 and 170 IAC 7-1.3), which is available online at www.IN.gov/legislative/ic_iac and at local libraries.

If you have a specific dispute with your landline telephone utility or have had repeated service quality problems, you should first contact your utility to resolve the matter. If the utility’s resolution is not to your satisfaction, you may contact the OUCC’s consumer services staff toll-free at 1-888-441-2494 or through our Website at www.IN.gov/OUCC.

DISCLAIMER: This fact sheet provides general information regarding Network Interface Device (NID) units, which vary among companies. You should follow all instructions from your local telephone service provider if you open a NID for line testing, in order to avoid serious bodily injury and to avoid damage to the NID. There is a risk of electric shock if testing is not done properly and cautiously. You should only conduct a NID test when standing on dry ground and only in appropriate weather conditions. Be careful when opening and closing the “customer access” compartment, and make sure it is tightly closed when the test is complete. Do not open the “company access only” compartment under any circumstances. The NID is the property of the telephone company. If it is damaged, the company may hold you responsible.